

MINUTES
SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
BJ's Restaurant
990 N. Center Street
Gaylord, Michigan
April 13, 2004

Chairman Bill Manson called the meeting of the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAC) to order at 9:02 a.m. on Tuesday, April 13, 2004 in Gaylord, Michigan.

Members Present:

Bill Manson, Region III, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Grand Rapids
Orville Olson, At-Large, Ludington
Elza Inman, Grant Sponsor, Brethren
James Duke, Region I, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Munising
Bill Lucas, Region II, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Cadillac
Lee Murray, At-Large, Hopkins
Jack Nelson, Business Community, Greenville

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Sheriff Terry Johnson, Antrim County
Rose Ingram, USFS, Huron-Manistee National Forest
Rick McVey, USFS, Ottawa National Forest

Staff Present:

James McMillan, Forest, Mineral and Fire Management (FMFM), Roscommon
Don Klingler, FMFM, Gaylord
Steve Kubisiak, FMFM, Lansing
James Radabaugh, State Trails Coordinator, Lansing
Lt. Jeff Gaither, Law Enforcement, District 5
Richard Kennedy, FMFM, Lansing
Mindy Koch, FMFM Chief, Lansing
Ron Yesney, FMFM, Western UP
Dan Moore, FMFM, Newberry

The Snowmobile Advisory Committee, Department staff and audience introduced themselves. **Mr. Manson** welcomed **Mr. Kevin Elsenheimer**, State Representative Candidate for the 105th District.

MINUTES

Acknowledged minutes of the January 27, 2004, Snowmobile Advisory Committee Meeting. **Mr. Duke made a motion, supported by Mr. Inman, to accept the minutes of the January 27, 2004 Snowmobile Advisory Committee meeting. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Gaylord to Cheboygan Work Group

Mr. Manson reported that the Natural Resource Commission (NRC) supported the concept of the proposal put forth by the Workgroup at the February NRC meeting. The major issues that remain to be resolved include use of Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) rights-of-way near I-75, and use of a portion of the Pigeon River Country State Forest (PRCSF). **Ms. Koch** reported that the workgroup's presentation to the Pigeon River Advisory Council went well; however, they did not support the designation of a snowmobile trail in the Pigeon River State Forest.

Mr. Manson noted the workgroup will be meeting again on April 14th.

Ms. Koch reported that the NRC has directed her to address the Natural Resources Trust Fund Board (NRTF) on April 21 in Lansing, to request them to rescind their snowmobile ban on the Mullet Lake portion of the Gaylord to Cheboygan Trail. She noted **Mr. Dan Wells** will also be making a presentation for the workgroup at the next NRTF meeting and added that there are serious trespass issues that must be dealt with on the Mullet Lake section of the trail. **Ms. Koch** said the Department will be meeting with MDOT officials to further discuss the rights-of-way issues on the proposed trail segment near I-75.

Trail Signage

Mr. Manson reported he is hearing complaints from grant sponsors concerning the snowmobile trail signage program. He said primary concerns involve poor quality sign material, inconsistencies in the inspection process and subjectivity among inspectors. He noted some Management Units are stricter in enforcing the standards than others. **Mr. Radabaugh** said this is the first year the new snowmobile trail signing handbook was used, and it is something to be improved upon. He said the Department will be reviewing the handbook and inspection process to see how to improve the program in the future.

Mr. Manson opened up the floor to public comments. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Radabaugh concluded by saying the Department will be working on signing specifications and formalize the process for inspections with an eye toward making it more consistent. He also asked the group for a show of hands on how many felt there were too many signs – overwhelming majority agreed. **Mr. Radabaugh** added the Department will be reviewing regulatory signs in both the Snowmobile and Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) programs, with an eye toward establishing one standard that is appropriate for both programs. Signs will be on the next agenda.

Trail Grooming

Mr. Manson reported problems in southern Michigan with crop damage due to Snowmobilers riding off the trail on bare ground on private property. He noted this is a difficult law enforcement issue, and added that there may be a potential need to amend the law to require a minimum snow base of 4 inches before the trails can be opened. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Manson noted a letter from the Department that was sent to one of the sponsors directing them to discontinue "double grooming". He questioned what constitutes a double groom and said a policy is needed to provide guidance to field staff and sponsors regarding how many trips should be made to keep the trails appropriately groomed, without abusing the system.

Discussion ensued. **Mr. Radabaugh** said the grooming issue and costs involved will be reviewed.

Finance Sub-Committee

Mr. Inman reported the Finance Sub-Committee is awaiting final figures from the sponsors in order to determine how much funding will be available for the spring round of special maintenance and equipment grants. He urged all sponsors to submit their final reimbursement requests to the Department as soon as possible. It is expected that the final figures will be determined sometime in May. **Mr. Manson** also noted the need to review the signing and brushing allotment.

Long Range Planning Sub-Committee

Mr. Olson reported the Long Range Planning Committee is working on three projects. The first is a public trip planning guide that will show the trails, but will not be detailed like the guide done by the local grant sponsors. The maps would be made available through tourist associations and welcome centers. He said he received a memorandum and contact list from the Department regarding the dispute resolution process, and will provide that information to the sponsors. **Mr. Olson** also noted the Long Range Planning Committee is working on an emergency response program for the trails. Discussion ensued.

STAFF REPORTS

Forest, Mineral and Fire Management

Mr. Radabaugh reported he will be setting up a meeting between **Bill Manson** and staff from the DNR's Office of Land and Facilities (OLAF) to further discuss the permanent trail initiative in the Upper Peninsula.

Mr. Radabaugh reported that an enhancement grant was submitted for improvements to the Cheboygan corridor and that he would be meeting that afternoon with officials from MDOT to discuss the application. He also noted the Department will be working with MDOT to discuss the potential of leasing several bridges on the Harlan-Yuma to Ann Arbor corridor.

Mr. Kubisiak reported he has been working on the SAC website and asked the Committee to review it and provide comments to him. The DNR website address is www.michigan.gov/dnr. Go to **Inside DNR** then **Snowmobile Advisory Committee**.

Mr. Kennedy reported he is working on the snowmobile sign order, equipment replacement and special maintenance grants, and updating the snowmobile trail grant handbook.

Mr. McMillan clarified that an event permit is required only when an activity is advertised, and an entry fee is charged for an activity held on State owned lands. However, he said if a group does not advertise or charge a fee for an event, but provides free food or beverages along the trails, it may be a land use issue that should be addressed through a separate land use permitting process. He noted the DNR is currently reviewing its Department wide land use policy. He added that the distribution of food or beverages to the public could become a Health Department issue, subject to permit. **Ms. Koch** said that it's a good idea for the Department to know what's going on, especially for safety reasons. She said there are some activities the Department would not want to see happen on State land. **Lt. Gaither** added that events or activities under permit also alert law enforcement agencies of planned activities, and is helpful for law enforcement purposes.

Ron Yesney reported on the status of various trail acquisition projects and snowmobile issues in the Western Upper Peninsula Management District. A copy of his report is attached.

Dan Moore reported he is preparing for campground inspections. He said he had received excellent feedback from Snowmobilers in the Upper Peninsula this year. He reported the support pillars for the new snowmobile bridge over I-75 have been installed and the contractor is preparing to begin construction on the approaches as soon as the road weight limits are lifted. **Mr. Moore** added that he will be assisting Mr. Kennedy with compiling the grooming reports and preparing the groomer cost analysis during Mr. Kennedy's transition into the snowmobile program.

Don Klingler reported that Mackinaw Village will be leaving the grooming program after this season, and a new club from Cheboygan will be taking over for them. He commended the Village for their two years of good work.

Law Enforcement

Sheriff Terry Johnson, Antrim County, reported that snowmobile law enforcement went well throughout the season in his county, with no fatalities to report. He added that education efforts were very successful.

Lt. Jeff Gaither, District 5 Law Enforcement, Gaylord, reported a total of 27 snowmobile fatalities as of the last week in March. He said this is a dramatic decrease from last year and attributed it to good snow fall throughout the State, better trail marking, more families snowmobiling and less drinking in bars.

USDA Forest Service

Rose Ingram, Huron-Manistee National Forest, reported Mr. Jim Schuler has retired and the Forest Service is in the process of hiring a new Forest Supervisor for the Huron-Manistee National Forest. She reported the Forest Service has received a proposal by the Lake Shore Snowmobile Club to develop a new snowmobile trail in the northwest Lower Peninsula. The proposed trail is approximately 38 miles and would go through Mason, Lake, Newaygo and Oceana Counties. She said the public comment period is open until May 9, 2004, and encouraged public comment. The scoping letter is posted on their website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/hmnf/>.

Rick McVey, USFS, Ottawa National Forest, reported they have doubled their patrol days in the forest this year, and they are working on re-establishing portions of a snowmobile trail that was in trespass on private land. He presented photographs of the award ceremony held in Milwaukee for the Snow Country By-Ways project; awards were presented to Mr. Manson, Mr. Duke and Mr. Moore.

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Norm Thiel, Trail Riders, stated a meeting was held between the Forest Service and the DNR to discuss various snowmobile trail issues in the Baldwin-White Cloud Ranger District last fall, but that nothing has been resolved yet. He expressed safety concerns about snowmobile use on 56th Street, and said that the temporary reroute was not working. He said Snowmobilers are still using 56th Street and a permanent solution is needed. **Ms. Ingram** stated that this area of the forest is managed for semi-primitive, non-motorized use, and involves a wild and scenic river corridor and adjacent forest land which is designated for old growth. **Ms. Ingram** will follow-up on the issue with the District Ranger and report back to Mr. Manson.

Don Carroll, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club, questioned if groomers would receive a fuel cost adjustment this year due to excessive fuel costs. **Mr. Manson** said this issue will be reviewed as part of the final grooming cost analysis.

Tom Gallagher, St. Helen Snowpackers, reported that he has re-done trail signs and expressed concern about the high rate of sign vandalism in the St. Helen area. He suggested that law enforcement should try to catch the thieves and fine them. He believes that a recycling program of signs would be a good idea. He said that grooming at \$3.50 a mile is inadequate to cover repairs for groomers. **Mr. Gallagher** suggested calling "Poker Runs" a "Fund Run" instead.

Larry Marzen, Alpena Snowmobile Association, commended DNR law enforcement and the Alpena Sheriff's Department for doing a good job on snowmobile enforcement this year. He noted that equipment costs have gone up 10%. **Mr. Marzen** questioned the status of the trail proposal their club submitted for a new trail connector near Alpena. **Mr. Radabaugh** said he is working with unit staff, and a letter will be sent to the association, with a copy sent to Mr. Manson as well.

Sil Mazzella, Alpine Snowmobile Club, asked Mr. Klingler and Mr. Kennedy about a fax he sent them regarding the need to install a fence on private land. He said the landowner would close the snowmobile trail unless a fence was installed. **Mr. Kennedy** responded that he had not received the letter from the landowner documenting that the trail would be closed. **Mr. Mazzella** said he would resend the letter to Mr. Kennedy.

Bill Taylor, Lewiston Fun Ones, inquired when the snowmobile grant handbook would be done. **Mr. Kennedy** said it will be sent out to the sponsors on May 15th. **Mr. Taylor** asked if concessions requiring a permit from the Department apply to private land. **Mr. McMillan** replied that the Department's concession and land use permitting process does not apply to private land.

Robert Holland, Les Cheneaux Sno Club, said that he would be interested in establishing a minimum snow depth ruling within cedar swamps. His concern is that even with a foot of snow it would still not be packed enough to support the groomer in wet areas. **Mr. Holland** announced a new website for groomers. He said the address is www.easternup.net, and added this is a forum for snowmobile grant sponsors to post updated grooming information.

Mark Dubie, Alpine Trails, said he is still waiting on a reply from the Department regarding his equipment cost justification for the drag, and noted that prices have already increased. **Mr. Mazzella** said that he had written a letter explaining costs and is still waiting on a response from the Department.

Bud Longroy, Ogemaw Hills Sno Club, had a question regarding colors for the "stop ahead" signs in the ORV handbook. **Mr. Kubisiak** said that the color scheme is the same that is used in the snowmobile program, and noted that the booklet was printed in black and white because of the current State ban on color printing.

Jeff Saylor, Crossroads Trailblazers Snowmobile Club, stated that the Yuma grade has had the rails removed by MDOT, and the corridor remains idle. **Mr. Radabaugh** said he will discuss this with MDOT officials when he meets with them.

Allan Green, Cadillac Winter Promotions added that the clubs are trying to secure longer term leases with MDOT on the Harlan-Yuma grade corridor.

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, June 22, 2004, 10:30 a.m., BJ's Restaurant & Catering, 990 North Center Street, Gaylord, Michigan.

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

Public Present:

Don Carroll, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club
Tom Gallagher, St. Helen Snowpackers
Bud Longroy, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club
Bob Humpert, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club
Bill Taylor, Lewiston Fun Ones
Robert Holland, Les Cheneaux Sno Club
Ollie House, Les Cheneaux Sno Club
Mike Rankin, Houghton Lake COC
Terry Black, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club
Kevin Elsenheimer, State Representative Candidate, 105th District
Jim Barrie, Elk Country Sno Travelers, Atlanta
Mark Dubie, Alpine Trails
Mark Sorensen, Elk Country Sno Travelers, NE MI Snowmobile Council
Rich Filley, Grayling Snowmobile Assoc.
Roland Rieger, PI Sno-Trails, Millersburg
William R. Caskey, Jordan Valley Trails Council

Jeff Saylor, Crossroads Trailblazers S.C.
Matthew Wier-Dieterman, Cadillac Winter Promotions
Allan Green, Cadillac Winter Promotions, NW Council
Gerry Argetsinger, Jordan Valley Trails Council
Tom Myers, Michigan Snowmobile Assoc.
Norm Thiel, Trail Riders
Fran Coon, Trail Riders, Baldwin
Larry Merzen, Alpena Snowmobile Assoc.
Tony Autorne, Les Cheneaux Sno Club
Don Mraz, St. Helen Snowpackers
Bob Eller, Alpena Snowmobile Assoc.
Ken McCrum, Elk Country Sno Travelers, Hillman, Atlanta
Rodney Altman, PI Sno Trail, Rogers City
John Houk, Northeast MI Snowmobile Council
William R. Caskey, Jordan Valley Trail Council
Sil Mazzella, Alpine Snowmobile Club
Jim Barber, Jordan Valley Trails Council
Bob Kaley, Jordan Valley Trails Council

Western Upper Peninsula Report

April 13, 2004

Ron Yesney

Chocolay Township Trail – The first year of snowmobile operation on the railroad grade through Chocolay Township is now under our belt. Chocolay Township and the MDNR partnered on law enforcement and trail analysis. The trail analysis from December through February confirmed - 81 complaints logged, 232.5 hours of law enforcement, 11 tickets issued, 37 warnings issued, and 1,664 contacts made. The trail count for January and February was 5,616 sleds. An open house will be held on April 28th at Chocolay Township to give people a chance to come in and informally discuss the snowmobile trail with MDNR and Chocolay Township officials.

Porcupine Mountain Trail Proposal – The Gogebic Range Trail Authority has submitted a new trail proposal to the South Boundary Road and into the Porcupine Mountains. We have the proposal and we're moving it through the channels. The proposed trail would be 19 miles long, would need at least 7 stream crossings, and would require 11 miles of new trail clearing. Because of the magnitude of the proposal, and because the trail needs to receive approval from several divisions of the MDNR, it may take awhile for the MDNR to approve or disapprove the trail.

Railroad Crossing in West Ishpeming – A railroad crossing in West Ishpeming that had been in existence for 20+ years caused a reroute this winter in West Ishpeming. Moose Country Trails was unable to attain a permit for use of the crossing from Canadian National Railroad and this led to a reroute onto a county road, along an M-28 business spur, and down a city street. Fortunately, the reroute was only in effect for 2 weeks until a permit was attained from Canadian National. The permit that was issued was only valid through March 31, 2004. However, Canadian National has agreed to work with Moose Country Trails and MDNR on relocating the trail crossing to a mutually agreeable location this summer.

Republic to Amasa - A trail proposal has been submitted by Moose Country Trails and the Chippewa Sno-Cats to connect Republic with Amasa. This would be a 50 mile east-west connector in the west-central Upper Peninsula that would travel through a largely wooded and non-populated area. The proposal is being evaluated at the local level by the MDNR.

Ishpeming to Humboldt Loop- The MDNR acquired an abandoned railroad corridor that runs from Ishpeming to Humboldt. The corridor has been approved for use as a snowmobile trail this coming winter. This loop will add 10 miles of trail to our system and help to disperse traffic along trail 8 in western Marquette County.

Other Information:

Emergency Response Request: Emergency response officials in Keweenaw County have requested that the Snowmobile Advisory Committee consider recommending mileage markers to be placed on all snowmobile trails. This request stems from an incident this past winter where a snowmobiler having medical problems on the trail could not be located by emergency response officials.

Acquisitions:

Keweenaw Point Land – The MDNR has recently taken ownership of an 8,387 acre tract near the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula. The tract includes 9 miles of Lake Superior Shoreline, several inland lakes, and Manitou Island. A Citizen Advisory Committee has been formed and is in the process of analyzing this 8,387 acre tract. The Advisory Committee will make land management recommendations to the Department. The Advisory Committee has a person (Don Kaupi) on board representing the interests of snowmobilers. The tract currently includes 2 groomed snowmobile trails and several other unofficial trails. The next meeting of this committee is May 3, 2004 at 6:30 p.m. at the Allouez Township Community Center near Calumet and the public is welcome to attend.